

I am Ariel Edwards, a first year student at Western Washington University, and a lifelong steward of the environment. The proposed Gateway Pacific Coal Terminal at Cherry Point would have many negative impacts on the environmental ecosystems, and human health. One of the most pressing issues, however, is the large impact on marine mammals, most notably the endangered orca whales who call the Puget Sound home.

Orcas are an endangered species and their numbers have been fluctuating since 1996. The South Salish Sea currently supports three pods consisting of 88 whales in total (Puget Sound Vital Signs). The three pods, J, K, and L, inhabit the San Juan Islands, the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and off the coastline in the Salish Sea respectively. The proposed GPT would involve over 950 transits from Cherry Point, via the San Juan Islands and Salish Sea, to China every year (Coal Train Facts). I ask that a study be done to determine how much area, currently inhabited by orca pods, would be disturbed daily by this added vessel traffic. This study must include an estimate of how much area the orcas in the Salish Sea need to survive, and more importantly, grow. If the vessels are found to inhibit the growth of the endangered orca communities then the choice of 'no action' should be taken.

These ships also produce a vast amount of noise pollution. Orca whales use natural sonar to search for food and navigate through their waters. They emit their high frequency clicks, which will then bounce off the nearest body in the water, allowing them to navigate. Additional ships are additional bodies that the orcas will have to navigate around and the loud noise from these huge vessels can greatly affect the orcas' ability to properly navigate their surroundings. Their sonar abilities are not the only thing in danger though. Studies have shown that noise pollution is contributing to hearing damage and whale displacement (Nature). Without the support of their pod these displaced whales generally die. The added noise pollution from the GPT's vessels would irreparably damage this highly at risk whale. With this said, a study should be done to determine the maximum amount of noise pollution that an orca whale can still function and use sonar in. This amount should then be compared to the expected amount of noise pollution these 950 vessels are expected to make. If the 950 vessels make enough noise to harm the orcas' hearing and/or sonar abilities, the choice of 'no action' must be taken.

I urge GPT and all involved in this process to fully study these negative impacts that the proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal can and will have on the already endangered Orca whale, and ultimately I urge you to choose 'no action' and stop this proposal in its tracks.

"Puget Sounds Vital Signs" - <http://www.psp.wa.gov/vitalsigns/orcas.php>

Coal Train Facts - <http://www.coaltrainfacts.org/>

"Nature – International Weekly Journal of Science"  
<http://www.nature.com/news/2008/080801/full/news.2008.997.html>

